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ABSTRACT

Examined is the combination of methods (aural, manual, oral) used within the philosophy of total communication for the deaf. The use of Cued Speech, a tool whose purpose is to make spoken language visually clear at the levels of phonems, syllables, suprasegmentals, words, and phrases, is advocated for communication with the deaf. (BD)

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Research Seminar

Cued Speech
and
'Total Communication'

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Cued Speech and 'Total Communication'

Among educators of the deaf, there is a growing realization that no one method of instruction or communication will meet the needs of all hearing impaired children. Further, there also is a realization that no one method will meet all the needs of any particular hearing impaired child. Training in speech, audition, language development, reading, and development as a communicating person must be accomplished by whatever methods or combination of methods give the best results. There also has been a growing trend toward acceptance of the idea that a child with a severe hearing loss must have a clear method of communication during the early years of life to facilitate his or her emergence as a person, as a developing, communicating human being.

Two philosophies of education of hearing impaired children predominate: oralism and total communication. We should keep in mind that these are not methods, but philosophies. Each employs a variety of methods, some aural-oral, some manual, and some neither oral nor manual, such as written language or pictures.

Oralism is a philosophy which places its major emphasis on the use of spoken language for communication, on development of aural-oral communication skills, and on the use of written language for teaching language. Total communication is a philosophy which emphasizes willingness to use any method that will help a specific child.

Cued Speech is neither a philosophy nor a method of education. It is a tool whose purpose is to make spoken language visually clear at the levels of phonemes, syllables, suprasegmentals, words, and phrases. It can be used within the context of either of the major philosophies of education of the

hearing impaired. Used within the philosophy of oralism, Cued Speech becomes the major modality for communication of hearing parents and siblings for use with a hearing impaired child. Cued Speech makes it possible for that child to learn spoken language as his or her language, without structured teaching. Used within the philosophy of total communication, Cued Speech takes its place beside sign language and fingerspelling as a third tool, used when spoken language is the focus of attention. We should be aware that Cued Speech currently is the only method of making spoken English visually clear, face-to-face, in real time.

We will examine in detail the combination of methods used within the philosophy of total communication. There appear to be several varieties of approaches which are described by this term, but two are most significant and most sharply different from each other. The first interpretation says that one should be prepared to use any method of communication with a hearing impaired child. After using various methods to see what works best with a given child, one should use that method primarily, turning to other methods to accomplish what the first cannot in order to expand the child's development to include all significant areas. A second interpretation is one which favors, more indiscriminately, all the different methods used with a single group of children -- signs, signs and fingerspelling in the pattern of English, pure oral communication, speech combined with signs and fingerspelling, written language, fingerspelling with speech.

The largest group of advocates of the total approach is the one which favors the consistent use of a combination of signs and fingerspelling as close as possible to the syntax of English, used in combination and synchronized with speech as well as possible. This group suggests supplementing this approach with auditory training, speech therapy, reading, and writing.

One should observe carefully the three basic elements of this method:

1. A clear manual presentation of the message, in a form as close as possible to the equivalent of written English using signs and fingerspelling in combination. The only way to get closer to written English is to fingerspell everything.
2. The manual presentation is accompanied by the spoken equivalent, so that receptive input includes a reminder of the spoken form, and expressive use gives practice in speaking.
3. The use of specific work on speech and audition to strengthen the grasp of the spoken forms, and on reading and writing to increase understanding of the written form.

It should be noted that essentially this is the "simultaneous" method as used at Gallaudet College for the last 35 years, but with three differences:

1. In the total communication approach, the simultaneous method is used with deaf children of all ages.
2. The simultaneous method is refined to increase the degree of faithfulness to English syntax, using any of several systems.
3. The emphasis on speech, auditory training, and the use of reading and writing in the teaching process is greater than when the simultaneous method is used with college-level students at Gallaudet College.

The strength of total communication lies in one basic factor. It provides the deaf child with a clear input of manual language, leading to the learning of *that* language, and permitting early use of *that* language expressively. Thus, the early use and development of communication is expedited without being impeded by the (usually) slower development of verbal language, receptive and expressive, by the child with a severe-to-profound hearing impairment.

If I understand the basic commitment of the "total" approach, it is the idea of making clear whatever one is trying to transmit to the hearing impaired child. Yet, many who advocate this approach overlook the fact that, as commonly used, total communication lacks a way of making the spoken language clear. In fact, the user of the so-called total approach has nothing at his or her disposal to use in transmitting the spoken form of the word that the oral teacher does not also have and use.

If total communication is to be consistent internally, it must have at its disposal a clear method of presenting the spoken language, whenever the spoken form is corrected, clarified, or taught. Otherwise, it is vulnerable to the same criticism leveled at oralists, that they do not present clearly the very form of language they emphasize most. Signs are clear; fingerspelling (at slow rates) is clear; written language is clear; but the ambiguous aural-oral input is not clear.

How important is spoken language to a hearing impaired person? Knowledge of spoken language is essential to the expressive use of speech and to speechreading. Moreover, so far as we know at this time, a prior knowledge of the spoken language is necessary for easy, natural development of reading skill and enjoyment of reading.

Fred Schreiber, Executive Director of the National Association of the Deaf, emphasized to me the fact that well-paying jobs are few and difficult to get for the deaf person who does not have useful speech. Oral communication skills are not as important as language development and cognitive skills, but they are important.

How important is reading skill to the hearing impaired person? It is the only window on the world, the only way to keep up with what happens throughout the world, for the person with impaired hearing. An intelligent person needs

to know about 20,000 English words in order not to be limited in opportunity. Not much arithmetic calculation is needed to know that there are not enough available hours to teach this many words. A hearing child learns three to five times as much language out of school as in school. A hearing impaired child needs both a way to learn spoken English and a way to learn to read outside the school.

Do not misunderstand me. I am not saying a deaf person cannot become a good reader, a good speechreader, or a good user of spoken language without Cued Speech. What I am saying is that without Cued Speech each spoken word must be taught to the severely hearing impaired child. Moreover, without Cued Speech each written word must be taught until and unless the child reads well enough to learn new written words through reading, without assistance from another person.

Let me explain. Cued Speech makes the sounds of spoken language visually different from each other. Thus a deaf child who knows Cued Speech can learn a spoken word, whether or not he or she can make all the sounds, from encountering it in a situation which makes its meaning clear. This means that a child with hearing parents and siblings who use Cued Speech can learn spoken English in the home, without being taught, with or without making sound.

In a total communication program, Cued Speech can be used at a number of different levels for various purposes. At its minimum, it could be used by speech therapists and classroom teachers for presenting and correcting pronunciation, for giving spelling tests, and when specifically working on word pronunciation, for teaching spoken words, phrases, and sentences.

A second area of usefulness of Cued Speech can be the home of the child with hearing parents. They can, similarly, use Cued Speech for correcting and clarifying pronunciation, and for teaching spoken language.

A significant opportunity for effective use of Cued Speech exists in

which it is apparent that the family will not be proficient enough in sign language to meet the child's needs as his or her command of language grows. A hearing family will not keep up with a hearing impaired child in a good total communication program unless its members significantly change their lives, spending a great deal of time in the company of deaf persons. By the time the child is 10 or 12 years old, the family likely will have been outdistanced (assuming the child is exposed to good total communication consistently in school), unless they have continuing access to deaf persons, or they continue working at sign language. Some families, especially in isolated areas where there are few deaf people, cannot do this. Others do not have the time or are not willing to make such an effort.

Most families can learn Cued Speech in a relatively short time and make available all the language they know for use with the child. If the child is in a total communication program, consistent support with Cued Speech at home certainly is better than inadequate sign language at home. All the English the child learns at home through Cued Speech will help the school to teach English, and leave time for learning other material while the child is in school.

I have pointed out that Cued Speech is not a substitute for sign language, which I consider to be the best method of communication among deaf persons. For communication between a hearing person and a deaf person, Cued Speech offers an advantage for the deaf person to learn English through communication rather than through instruction.

One of the tragic aspects of education of the deaf is the ratio between what is learned in the absence of teaching and what is learned through teaching. A hearing child learns more language before he or she enters school than all during the rest of life. There is no way to enable the deaf child from con-

tinually falling behind the hearing child unless we provide a way to learn English, spoken and written, without specifically teaching it. Theoretically, Cued Speech can make this possible, if members of the family are hearing people. Anecdotal evidence to support this hypothesis is abundant, but until controlled research is confirmed we must consider it only as an encouraging possibility.

One more implication for total communication should be noted. Signed English does not allow English words to be learned without teaching, but it can be used to teach written English words by pairing them with signs already known.

Only time will tell whether Cued Speech or Signed English is more effective for classroom instruction of English or for teaching English at home. If Cued Speech turns out more successfully than Signed English for this purpose, it can free sign language from being distorted to fit English or, as one might say, having to "carry English on its back." This would allow sign language to evolve as the best gesture language possible, fully adequate for the communication needs of those who use it.

May I close with a review of the status of education of the severe-to-profoundly deaf. It is succeeding only in the area which teaches these students to make speech sounds and to use a minimal amount of residual hearing in reinforcing speech. It is failing to produce a knowledge of spoken language adequate for effective use of speech for communication, for maximizing speechreading ability, or for easy, natural development of reading skills. If we are to make good readers of the deaf, we must either find a way to enable them to learn the spoken language well, or we must find an alternative way to enable them to learn to read.

What is my point? There should be an element of desperation in our search for better methods of educating the deaf. We should examine every possibility

carefully and thoroughly. If this is the underlying principle of total communication, and I think it is, I have no trouble in subscribing to it.